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# AN APPEAL FOR THE RECONSIDERATION OF SOME TESTING BIBLICAL PASSAGES

Slowly, very slowly, does the guild of biblical scholars, and of historical students of the Jewish and Christian religions, grant admission to novel ideas which come from outside. And though we may congratulate ourselves that our guild now fully recognizes the illustrative value of the Assyrian and Babylonian inscriptions (not to speak just now of any others), yet we are not on the very best of terms with the more audacious Assyriological pioneers who have, with the speed of Jonah's gourd, sprung up, and, it is said, annexed the Bible, and we show considerable reluctance to give a favorable consideration to their philological and historical theories. This, however intelligible, is unfortunate; for in dealing with new problems audacity is called for. "Be bold" is a good motto from the *Faerie Queene*, though certainly "Be not too bold" is almost as good, and should be combined with the other. We biblical critics are in much need of stirring up, and really we ought to be thankful to anyone who, after taking some pains to realize our deficiencies, will stir us up. A great chance of renovating our study is offered to us, and it seems to some that we are not making the best of it. Not yet have we quite emerged from the stage represented by the first and second editions of Schrader's excellent work, *Die Keilinschriften und das Alte Testament*, and the point of view so lucidly presented in the third is not congenial to us.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it may plausibly be held that the emphasis with which Delitzsch, Winckler, and others have put forward their far-reaching claims on behalf of Babylon is producing a reaction in our minds against cuneiform research regarded as a source from which anything like even a partial regeneration of our study may be expected. And the somewhat disparaging treatment accorded by these Assyriologists to Old Testament critics contributes to the unpleasantness which has arisen.

It is true that in England (or must I say Britain?) and in America less harm appears to have been done than in Germany by the impetuosity of some of the Assyriologists, and there is, if I am not much mistaken, in England a growing impression that one great want of our schools of learning is a supply of Assyriologists who are in touch with the theologians, or, better still, a certain number of Assyriological theologians in our theological faculties. In writing this I do not mean to imply that we in England are

<sup>1</sup> May I be permitted to say that my appreciation of the work of Winckler and Zimmern does not imply that I think their revolutionary treatment of good old Schrader's work fully justified?

suffering from an Assyriological famine. I only mean that the supply of scholars who are more or less in touch with Assyriologists is not equal to the demand, and that upon the whole our biblical scholars tend to take rather too external a view of Babylonian and Assyrian life and religion. One more criticism I am bound to make. It applies not only to British, but to almost all critics of the Old Testament known to me, and, though in much less degree, to the most audacious of all the would-be annexers of the Old Testament among the Assyriologists—Hugo Winckler. The Old Testament critics, as a rule, together with Hugo Winckler (could I do him a greater honor than by so mentioning him?), are too conservative in their treatment of the Massoretic text. Winckler himself is strangely unequal. Sometimes he is as bold as it is permissible to be, though seldom, indeed, does he give equal proof of judgment; I do not blame him—how can one man succeed in everything? At other times he is just as much in the fetters of the Massoretas as if he were an ordinary professor of the Old Testament. Sometimes he sees problems with an acuteness which is really surprising, even though, from want of experience, he only now and then solves them. At other times he does not see them at all, and then gives way to the temptation of applying the Assyriological key where it cannot open the lock. And as for the guild of Old Testament workers, they too are in other ways sadly disappointing. It appears to me that even the more progressive of them are in the habit of using methods which, though right enough in themselves, need to be applied with much more moderation, and to be supplemented by new methods derived from a wider and deeper study of the text, and a much fuller classification of phenomena. Perhaps a similar comparison may have to be passed upon those of us who have much to do with the Septuagint. We seem to be as powerless to recognize what is the ultimate text which underlies the Hebrew text produced by retroverting, as we are to discover the ultimate text underneath the Massoretic. I hasten to add that I am not unwilling to take these criticisms back, if critics will only prove them to be inapplicable to their case.

In this state of things it must be difficult to use the Assyriological, and indeed also the Egyptological, or any other key, with perfectly satisfactory results. Even from a liberal-conservative point of view, a really keen criticism would probably disclose a certain amount of weakness in some of the supposed Assyriological and Egyptological confirmations of biblical history. And if we will but throw aside prejudice, and recognize the extreme probability of the corrections of the Hebrew text suggested in 1898 by Hugo Winckler, on the ground of his discovery of the Arabian

Muṣri and Kus, we shall inevitably, in the course of no long time, come to the conviction that many more references to the neighboring Arabian regions must exist underneath our present Hebrew text than Winckler in 1898 brought to light.

It has therefore appeared to me that if there is any kernel of truth in what I have said, before we proceed to greater lengths in applying the Assyriological or the Egyptological key, and indeed before we go much farther in popularizing "confirmations from the monuments," we ought to re-examine the text of the Old Testament on a large scale, using new methods as well as old, and controlling our textual criticism, wherever possible, by a regard to Winckler's discovery. My own advocacy of this view has thus far had but slight success, and yet I may venture to hold that thus far the liberal-conservative scholars of our day have not done their best work in the textual criticism of hard passages, though some glosses have, I am glad to think, been successfully pointed out. I feel bound, therefore, as my next step, to ask a few questions of my fellow-students, that I may know whether they are for the most part really satisfied with the exegetical explanations of a number of passages current in the commentaries and lexicons. If they are, then there is nothing more that I can say; one must still wait patiently for further developments. If, however, they admit that there is much that is provisional in the current explanations, then I hope that my own supposed critical failure will stir them up to produce some fresh explanations of these passages, which may have a chance of compelling the assent of all keen-sighted critics. And in any debate which may then arise I hope that we shall set an example of that tolerance and mutual respect which ought surely to distinguish biblical scholars. I propose to base my questions on Exod., chaps. 1-19; Deut., chaps. 12-26; and Leviticus.

In Exod. 2:3 we read that the mother of Moses daubed the box of papyrus reed containing the infant with bitumen and with pitch. Are critics satisfied with Dillmann's observation that the Egyptians procured their asphalt from Palestine (Strabo and Diodorus)? The question has a bearing on the genesis of the story of the birth of Moses.

Can critics show some fresh reason for adopting the theory that "Mosheh" (see Exod. 2:10) is a Hebraized form of the Egyptian Mesu, in spite of the first of the objections urged in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, col. 3205? This, of course, is a branch of the larger question, whether the exodus was from Egypt or from Muṣri, but the question ought to be determined philologically.

Exod. 3:2. Dillmann evidently feels that "out of the midst of the

thorn-bush" (מִתּוֹךְ הַסֵּנֶה) has not been adequately explained. In Deut. 33:16 we have "the good-will of him that dwells in the thorn-bush" (שֹׁכֵנִי סֵנֶה). The enigma has, I know, been half solved. But a larger inquiry seems to be wanted to solve it entirely. If I am wrong, let our critics strike out an entirely new and cogent explanation. On "the angel of Yahweh" as equivalent to Yahweh, see below.

How do our critics reconcile the strange story in 4:26 with the fact that Moses has just received such a great and honorable mission? The story would be more natural if the assailant of Moses were one of those malicious jinn, or earth-demons, whom an Arabic folk-lore of primitive origin represents as at feud with man. What had Moses done that was wrong? He had neglected to be circumcised, say some, and Zipporah supposed that it would do if her son were circumcised instead of Moses. Are critics satisfied with this? Will they pledge themselves to the correctness of the text? If not, can they produce any adequate corrections which have been reached by sound methods?

Is it likely that two Hebrews should have had colloquies (see 5:1, etc.) with a king so fenced in by etiquette as the king of Egypt? Such a story reminds us of Jonah's successful preaching in Nineveh. There is no evidence that the writer considered Moses to have held a rank in Egyptian society which facilitated his admission, together with Aaron, before Pharaoh.

In 6:12, 30, is the phrase "uncircumcised in lips" correct? The argument that Moses is not eloquent has already been offered by him as a reason why he should not be sent to the Israelites; in 6:12, 30, we expect a new and special reason why he should not be sent to the oppressive king. Will the critics solve this enigma?

Can they either produce a new explanation of הִתְפַּאֵר עָלַי (8:5), or correct the text by sound methods? "Let your Majesty vouchsafe" (Baentsch), and "Be pleased to appoint" (Kautzsch), seem to be very difficult.

Do the "established principles of criticism" which my opponents think so perfect and all-sufficing suggest to any of them a self-evident explanation of וַיְהִי חֹשֶׁךְ (10:21)? "And let one handle darkness" is the natural rendering, but this, of course, will not do. Why must the text be right?

12:37. Are the critics satisfied that Pithom and Etham are the same name, and are to be equated with Succoth? This view is held by Professor W. Max Müller (*Encyclopædia Biblica*, col. 1936), in spite of 13:20. It should be noticed, however, that we have a Succoth in Gen. 33:17 and elsewhere. Are the critics sure that the name has not the same origin

and meaning both in Genesis and in Exodus? A large inquiry is necessary; are the critics prepared to institute it?

12:37. "About six hundred thousand on foot—the men, apart from the children?" On this "enormous number" (Baentsch) recent commentators, and Colenso before them, have had much to say. Is there no shorter and better way to account for it than Dillmann's? Is there nothing suspicious about the reading? Much depends upon the answer.

12:38. עֲרֵב רַב, according to Siegfried-Stade "a numerous mixture," i. e., "aliens of various origin," comparing Neh. 13:3. It is usual to regard this as a synonym of אֲסֻפָּה, Numb. 11:4, as if "a collection." Do our critics feel quite happy in repeating these views? Granting that the *Encyclopædia Biblica* must have missed the mark, cannot its censors suggest something better?

12:40. In the present state of the exegetical discussion of this passage, as given in the Massoretic text and in the versions, in combination with Gen. 15:13, one may fairly ask if someone of the bolder critics among my opponents will not seize the opportunity for distinguishing himself. There must be something better to say on this matter than has been said, for instance, by Dillmann.

12:42. What does שְׂמֵרִים mean? The critics do not agree. Nor is this all the difficulty. In Kautzsch's Bible I find four dots between "out of Egypt" and "for all Israelites;" i. e., Socin and Kautzsch are hopelessly baffled by הוּא הַלִּילָה הַזֶּה לִיהוּדָה שְׂמֵרִים. From my own point of view, the difficulties arise from corruption of the text, and few, I hope, will assert that the text is quite sound.

14:6 f. In vs. 6 Pharaoh prepares his chariot (*sing*), but in vs. 7 we hear of six hundred choice chariots, over every one of which were *shalishim*. It is surely a weak remedy for these difficulties to invoke the theory of a difference in the sources. Professor Paul Haupt has rightly felt that the first thing to do is to examine the text with the view of correcting it. But are the critics satisfied with his suggestions? For my part, I am not. My own view has long been written down, but since the critics referred to have hardly as yet changed their attitude toward my work, I would respectfully urge them to produce something fully worthy of their critical reputation. Perhaps Professor Haupt may see his way to improve upon his first suggestions.

14:19. "The angel of God" (הַמַּלְאָכִים) is here evidently equivalent to the "Yahweh" of 13:21. For this there are, of course, parallels enough (ch. 3:2) which I need not mention. But how is this usage to be accounted for? How can a Being who was virtually identical with

the God Yahweh be called a messenger? It is no use to refer to the phrase "the angel of his face" in Isa. 63:9, and the "angels of the face" in Enoch and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs; for these too have to be accounted for. Surely we critics ought not to rest content till we have explained these phrases and the way they are used. Let my fellow-scholars produce an adequate theory, and then they will have a good reason for their inattention to my own explanation.

16:3. Can no one deliver us from the improbable supposition that, whether in Egypt or in north Arabia, the Israelites had a regular flesh diet? The same difficulty, I know, arises with regard to Numb. 11:4, 5; but Professor Gray, with his usual candor, has already set forth the difficulties, or, let me rather say, flagrant improbabilities, of that passage. Will not some of our clever young scholars exercise their critical ability here without falling headlong into my own deplorable heresies? The reputation of the prevalent school of criticism seems to me to be at stake.

17:15, 16. From my own point of view, the article "Jehovah-nissi" in the *Encyclopædia Biblica* opens the way to an adequate solution. It is not, however, clear that the explanation there given is right. The critics may, therefore, perhaps be justified in refusing to listen to it; for few scholars take the trouble to look for the element of truth in an imperfect theory. I shall be only too glad to be converted to the truth, if the critics can find it. If, however, they fail, I may be excused for adhering firmly to my own revised and, as I hope, adequate explanation.

19:13. "When the ram's horn is blown." Does יובל really mean (1) "ram," (2) "ram's horn"? Lev. 25:13 is still more difficult. If the critics will criticise the word יובל anew, it will be a favor.

I now pass on to the central part of the Book of Deuteronomy. Let me begin by asking whether critics really accept the rendering "under every green tree," for תחת כל עץ רענן, in the famous formula relative to the places where the Israelites, against the will of the prophets, worshiped other gods than Yahweh? My question is suggested by Deut. 12:2, but the formula which contains this phrase is also to be found in 1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 16:4; 17:10; Isa. 57:7; 65:7; Jer. 2:20; 3:6, 23; 17:2; Ezek. 6:13; 18:6, 11; 20:28. Supposing the vague "green" to be abandoned, what is to be the substitute? "Sappy"? "Pliant"? Merely to mention these words is to show how difficult it is to be sure what such an expression can have meant. Had the phrase been עץ צבוח, which occurs in Lev. 23:40; Ezek. 20:28; Neh. 8:15, it would perhaps have been easier. But here too, as is well known, there is a difficulty, not as yet removed. For we expect the name of some definite kind of tree,

standing as עץ עבה does between "palmtrees" and "willows." Nor is עבה quite properly rendered "with thick foliage." I would therefore ask whether those who work on the "established principles of criticism" have no light to throw, first and chiefly, on the phrase rendered "under every green tree," and, secondly, on that rendered "thick tree"? For no one has ever said that the principle *de minimis non curat lex* applies to criticism. If anyone really could throw some fresh light on phrases like these, it would probably lead on to some more distinctly fruitful line of inquiry.

Passing along the text, which, on the whole, is agreeably smooth, I am next arrested by the singular precept—also found in Exod. 23:19; 34:26; in a different context—"Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk" (Deut. 14:21b). Will critics kindly say whether they are satisfied with the current explanations of this? Is this a precept of humanity like Lev. 22:28, Deut. 22:6, 7? But in this case we should have expected more definite language (cf. Lev. 22:27), nor is בִּשְׂלִי, "to seethe," generally synonymous with אָכַל, "to eat." Or does the law mean, "Thou shalt not boil kid's flesh in milk," and shall we see in it an allusion to the custom still common among the Arabs of boiling flesh in sour milk? But how can נֶדִי mean "kid's flesh"? And could the charge of inhumanity, suggested by the reference to "its mother," have been brought against the cook? Robertson Smith proposed a new idea. Milk having been sometimes viewed by the ancients as analogous to blood, as containing a sacred life, the prohibition may have reference to an ancient form of sacrifice similar to the sacrifice of blood.<sup>2</sup> Milk-offerings have, in fact, no place in the Hebrew cultus. Do the critics feel satisfied that this idea can be applied without violence to the Hebrew? Or do they feel more attracted by the older view<sup>3</sup> that some magical broth designed to fertilize the fields is intended? Have any of these theories the quality of naturalness? The words, however, are plain enough; why cannot the critics, with all the resources of philology and comparative religion, explain them?

Will our critics, I wonder, go on much longer rendering 16:21 either, "Thou shalt not fix for thyself an Asherah (composed of) any kind of wood," or, "Thou shalt not plant for thyself an Asherah—any kind of tree?" In either case the apposition is, I should have thought, intolerably harsh, and in the former case to render נָטַע "to fix," when עץ

<sup>2</sup> *Religion of the Semites*, 2d ed., p. 221, note; cf. p. 220, and Lagrange, *Études sur les religions sémitiques*, pp. 262, 396.

<sup>3</sup> *Encyclopædia Biblica*, col. 2897, quotes Spencer, *Leg. Heb. Rit.*, Vol. I, pp. 335 ff. 1732.



follows, is difficult. The passage is, of course, important in its relation to the discovery of the name of a goddess Aširtu, equated with Astart in the Amarna correspondence, and also in the first of the Taanak cuneiform tablets.

Apropos of 18:11, I must again confess the perplexity which I feel at the attitude of scholars. Can it be that they are satisfied with any of the current explanations of אֵיב ("familiar spirit") and יִדְעֹנִי ("wizard")? Does the former word mean "a bottle," or "a hollow cavern," or "a soul which returns" (a *revenant*)? Or is it connected with אב, "father"? And does the latter really mean "a very wise one?" The sense is plausible, but how, if we adopt it, is the *yidde'ōni* to be distinguished from the 'ōb? "It is hard," remarks a writer in the *Encyclopædia Biblica* (col. 1121), "to establish the distinctions offered by Robertson Smith and Driver, the data for forming a judgment being so slight." Must we, then, confess ourselves baffled? Can no one lead us a step forward? Can we not find any point of connection between these difficult words and others already (as we may reasonably hope) explained, in such a way as to open a window into Israelitish beliefs?

Exegesis has been sorely tried by the three enactments in 22:9-11, and critical lexicography by the strange-looking word שַׁעֲטָנִי in the last of these three precepts. Why should a vineyard not be "sown with divers seed" (i. e., as Dillmann thinks, planted with grain or vegetables between the vines)? And why refer, in prohibitory terms, to the singular case of plowing with an ox and an ass together? Dillmann, it is true, thinks that "plowing" was suggested by the legislator's peculiar interpretation of the word usually rendered "thou shalt cause to copulate," in the parallel passage, Lev. 19:19, and with reference to the use of mules, now become common. Why, too, should there be a prohibition of garments composed of linen and wool together? A writer in the *Encyclopædia Biblica* ("Dress," §7) suggests that the object of the law may have been to mark the distinction between the priest and the layman. But did the priests wear garments of the mixed material? This may be supported by Josephus,<sup>4</sup> but is opposed to Ezek. 47:17, where it is said that "no wool shall come upon them." And can שַׁעֲטָנִי really have been taken to mean "linen and wool?" The writer of Deut. 22:11 may seem indeed to have given the word this meaning, but the Septuagint, with its *κίβδηλον*, shows that some early students thought differently. Surely שַׁעֲטָנִי cannot be the right reading. Nothing is gained by conjecturing that the term, and indeed the law itself, may be of foreign origin (*Encyclopædia Biblica*), unless some other reason than our convenience can be offered for the conjecture.

<sup>4</sup>*Antiquities*, iv, 8, 11.

Let me add that Professor Bertholet, in Marti's series of commentaries, candidly admits that "the sense of these prohibitions is no longer evident." He conjectures that they have arisen out of a primitive conception that different things belong to different circles of cultus, and these ought not to be mixed. Somewhat similarly, Steuernagel supposes that the forbidden practices stand in some relation to the cults of the powers of nature, and may soon have symbolized the fusion of two deities. Can no better explanation be offered? Is it not time that some fresh key were applied?

I doubt whether any commentator has yet explained how the reference in 24:9 to what Yahweh did to Miriam (Numb. 12:10) can be a reason for obeying sedulously all the directions of the priests respecting leprosy. If so, is it not time for the critics to take up the problem again, and perhaps to attempt a methodical correction of the text?

The reader is not to suppose that I have myself no answers to give to these questions. I only wish to make sure that those who shrink back in horror from what I have recently proposed have something far better to produce than my own textual corrections. I now pass on to the Book of Leviticus. I wish that I could profitably offer a larger number of doubts for the critics to remove. But these passages (on which I hold views of my own) appear to me to be well deserving of a renewed investigation, and to explain them adequately would be a contribution toward a final proof of the soundness of the prevalent criticism.

In 2:19 I find in the Authorized Version, as the rendering of **גרש כרמל**, "corn beaten out of full ears," and in the Revised, "bruised corn of the fresh ear"; Professor Driver's version in the *Sacred Books of the Old Testament* is unfortunately not at hand. Of course, the chief difficulty is with **כרמל**, and we are in the same evil plight with 2 Kings 4:42, where **כרמל** is supposed to have the same unusual meaning as in Lev. 2:14. Will not some experienced textual critic, for the credit of "established principles," gird himself to the task of accounting for, or correcting, the word **כרמל** in these two passages?

In 5:15 are our critics really satisfied with the current explanation of **כסף שקלים**? Kautzsch, in his *Old Testament*, actually gives us "einen Wert von mindestens zwei Sekeln." Knobel and Dillmann also affirm that, according to the legislator's intention, the ram is to be of such a size as to be worth "shekels in the plural, even if only two." I should also like a justification of the phrase **שקל הקדש**. If what is meant is the Syrian or Phœnician shekel, why does not the law expressly say **שֶׁקֶל צֶר**? Unless this difficulty can be removed, I fear that textual correction is called for. Will the "established principles of criticism," I wonder, stand the test?

16:8. "One lot for Yahweh, and one lot for עֶזְזֶל." I find that the methods I use suggest a plausible explanation for Azazel. But our critics are so sure of their ground, and so confident that I have made a critical failure, that I feel bound to ask them if, stirred up by my misfortune, they cannot outdo all previous explanations, and solve the problem of Azazel. No self-love on my part shall hinder my acceptance of a genuine solution offered by the critics.

17:7. Who are the שְׂעִירִים? Professor Gray's article "Satyrs" in the *Encyclopædia Biblica* is thoroughly satisfactory as a conspectus of current opinions with reasonable criticisms. But it seems to come to very little. I have the same notice to give, and the same appeal to make, as in the preceding paragraph.

18:21. Are critics satisfied with the view that מִלֵּךְ derives its vowels from בָּשֶׁת, "shame"? And is the connected view that בָּשֶׁת in "Ishbosheth" is an edifying substitute for בַּעַל free from serious objection?

25:10. "Year of the ram's horn." The explanation given in *Critica Biblica*, on Josh. 6:4, may of course be wrong; certainly it needs development to suit Lev. 25:10 ff. But it reposes on a number of observed phenomena. Is it discourteous to ask that those who may condemn it will justify this condemnation by giving some better-supported theory?

Such are the questions which I have been led to put to the advocates of what some have called the "established principles of criticism"—principles which I for my part have no wish at all to disestablish, but only to regulate and to supplement. It would have been much more congenial to me to continue on the "old paths," refining and refining, building stage upon stage of our *zikkurat* according to the plan sketched by our predecessors. So much learning and skill have been lavished on this great erection that I cannot speak otherwise than respectfully of those who still guard and embellish it. But I believe that both from the side of oriental archæology and from that of textual criticism it is destined to suffer severely, and I think that it is best that members of the guild of critics should themselves lay careful hands on the sacred structure. The choice, if I am not much mistaken, lies between demolition and skilful reconstruction.

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